

A Quick Peek
in the

Crystal Ball

Utah Occupational Projections
Preliminary Results




Business economist Edgar R. Fiedler once said, “He who lives by the crystal ball soon learns to eat ground glass.” It’s certainly true that projecting economic activity is a difficult endeavor fraught with the inherent pitfalls of forecasting in general. That’s why at the Utah Department of Workforce Services (DWS), we follow Fiedler’s advice, “If you have to forecast, forecast often.”

Every two years, economists at DWS produce occupational projections for Utah. Why? There are basically two reasons: to provide career decision-makers with demand-based information and to help educators determine which courses of study would most benefit the current and upcoming workforce.

While the projections have not been finalized at this writing, preliminary figures do provide a glimpse of predicted labor force changes between the base year of 2006 and 2016.

Demand Side Economics

First, a word of caution: These projections only provide information on the “demand” side of the labor market equation. Also, remember that openings are created in two ways. Replacement job openings are created when people leave an occupation for retirement, for a new occupation, to sail around the world, or whatever reason. New openings are generated when companies expand or move to the area (growth). Because employers need to replace workers leaving an occupation, even declining occupations (like farming) will



still have openings available. In fact, in a slowing economy, replacement job openings can exceed openings due to growth.

What Do the Projections Say?

The implications of the current set of projections are not all that much different from those of the past set of projections. Three major occupational groups are expected to continue their reign as the fastest-growing categories—health-care support, computer/mathematical, and healthcare practitioners/technical occupations. In addition, during this round of projections, community/social services occupations joined the previously mentioned triumvirate.

Not surprisingly, occupations with the highest growth rates (and a significant number of openings) are included in previously mentioned groups—home health aides, computer software engineers, network systems analysts/data communications analysts, mental health/substance abuse social workers, and medical assistants.

Just the Openings

When the number of openings is examined, a different picture emerges. It makes sense that occupations with substantial current employment will show large numbers of projected openings. This is certainly the case in this round of projections.

Office/administrative support and sales occupations currently maintain the largest employment levels in Utah—and are projected to show the most openings ten years out. By detailed occupation, retail sales persons, customer services representatives, cashiers, waiters/waitresses, office clerks, and fast food workers rise to the top of the list for most new openings. They're big occupations, they create lots of new openings as the economy expands, and because they are typically "starter" jobs, they generate lots of replacement openings.

Look to the Stars ★

In an effort to help in the task of career decision-making, once the projections are finalized, we will apply "star" ratings by occupation. Yes, it's just like a movie review—five stars are best. These ratings are determined based on the number openings, the rate of job growth, and wages. So stayed tuned for more information to help your children (or yourself) make a great career choice. In the meantime, check out our career information at: <http://jobs.utah.gov/opencms/wi/occi.html> ⓘ

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—Edgar R. Fiedler